

# **Contexts of Diaspora Citizenship: Citizenship and Civic Integration of Somalis in Finland and the United States**

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Päivi Harinen, Ville-Samuli Haverinen,  
Marko Kananen, and Jussi Ronkainen

## **I. Introduction**

With more than one million people scattered around the world, Somalis form a significant part of the world's diaspora population. Although Somalia has recently experienced a certain level of stability and encouraging developments, the diaspora community keeps growing. Due to security threats, drought, and famine, millions of Somalis still live in refugee camps. These problematic conditions imply that the Somali diaspora must remain the focus of transnational migration research generating new perspectives and insights. Furthermore, although return to Somalia might be an option for some of the Somalis living in diaspora, many of them will not return. That is why research should pay attention to their opportunities to live as equal citizens in their new home countries.

This article adds another voice to the rich and complex scientific discourse about the Somali diaspora. It presents an analysis of the possibilities and obstacles that Somali immigrants face while striving for full and equal membership in two very different societies: the United States and Finland. The analysis is based on a comparison between national laws and policies that regulate the immigrants' chances to enjoy certain civic rights, have access to employment, participate in public life, and be protected against discrimination. In addition, it uses statistics from both countries to illustrate how Somali immigrants have managed to access these rights. The empirical figures thus outline the concrete and conceptual frames of diaspora citizenship.

This comparison is based on the notion that diaspora citizenship takes different shapes in different political, cultural, and juridical contexts—and that the states can learn efficient integration policies from each other. Finland and the United States have very different experiences with immigration, and their immigration and integration laws and policies differ greatly. The United States has a long history of immigration, while Finland has encountered this phenomenon only recently. Although the Finnish authorities are at times overwhelmed with this development, there is a great deal of political effort to try to manage the new situation. In the United States, in turn, the integration of immigrants has historically been carried out by members of the local community, rather than by state or federal authorities. This *laissez-faire* approach to integration has relied on strong labor market and anti-discrimination laws. A detailed comparative analysis focusing on immigrants' citizenship possibilities can help to identify the benefits and pitfalls of these different approaches.

However, analyses that deal merely with policies and legislation will remain hollow. Immigrants do not form a homogeneous group and their living conditions and citizenship aspirations cannot be described solely by looking at the juridical and political framework. In “real life,” policies and laws intertwine with immigrants' positions as citizens or denizens, as well as their age, gender, education, duration of stay, language capabilities, labor market positions, and personal histories. This complexity calls forth manifold and demanding analyses. We will, however, begin with a more general comparison of Somali immigrants' situations in Finland and the United States.

In this essay, civic integration refers to the immigrants' potential to have a secure residence status, live with their family, have access to employment and education, be able to participate in public life, and be protected against discrimination. This article is a part of a four-year (September 1, 2012–August 31, 2016) research project, *Contexts of Diaspora Citizenship—Transnational Networks, Social Participation and Social Identification of Somalis in Finland and in the U.S.* Before the analysis, we will clarify how we define the concepts of citizenship and civic integration. We will then present the data and the methodology, and briefly introduce the background of Somali migration to Finland and to the United States.

## II. Citizenship and Civic Integration

In contemporary debates, citizenship has been seen as a multilevel position, reaching from local to global contexts, and connected to multiform and overlapping identities and loyalties.<sup>1</sup> That is why it is reasonable to divide citizenship analytically and conceptually into two different dimensions and relationships: citizenship as a *status* and citizenship as a *practice*.<sup>2</sup> Citizenship as a status refers to citizenship as a political-juridical concept. It is a legal status with rights and duties attached to it. Citizenship as a practice, in turn, has a more sociologically defined content.<sup>3</sup> It materializes in social, political, and economic participation and in the cultural and psychological sense of belonging and identity.<sup>4</sup>

Citizenship as a legal status is a relationship between an individual and the state, as well as an individual and the other citizens of the state. In political theory, citizenship is a universal concept, which means that because many Somali immigrants in the United States and Finland have been admitted to citizenship in their new home countries, they should have equal membership positions and possibilities with all their fellow citizens. However, citizenship as a status presents merely an ideal; more important than the official legal status is the actual *access* to citizenship possibilities.<sup>5</sup> When we look at citizenship as a practice, we notice the consequences of real life.

In this article we analyze both legal and actual citizenship under the concept of *civic integration*. We scrutinize the civic integration of immigrants, and especially Somali immigrants, using four categories: (1) settling in, (2) options in educational and labor markets, (3) membership in the collective decision-making communities, and (4) ethnic equality and anti-discrimination practices. Although these are important and integral aspects of citizenship to study, it should be borne in mind that our analysis leaves out several conditions that affect civic participation, such as health, housing, and broader participation possibilities in civil society.

## III. Data and Methods

The aim of this essay is to build a socio-political and juridical framework for Somali immigrants' civic integration and citizenship participation. Our preliminary statistical data comes from the international Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX)<sup>6</sup> database, and it is supple-

mented by national statistics specific to Somali immigrants. MIPEX can help to sketch out successful (or failing) national integration policies, but the results are very general because the whole immigrant population is treated as one entity. That is why it is necessary to look at Somali immigrants' positions more specifically.

MIPEX is a reference tool that measures governments' commitment to integration and monitors how this commitment translates into policies, which provide immigrants with opportunities to participate equally in society. The project is led by the British Council and the Migration Policy Group. The third edition of MIPEX compares the migration and integration policies of twenty-nine European countries, the United States, and Canada, up to May 2010. The index results are tabulated from a 148-question survey that rates current laws and policies against a set of aspirational standards for immigrant integration. MIPEX covers seven broad policy areas of integration: labor market mobility, education, family reunion, political participation, long-term residence, anti-discrimination, and access to citizenship. Each of the areas is divided into subcategories containing several questions that are scored on a scale of 0 to 100.

MIPEX has some methodological limitations, which must be taken into consideration. First of all, the survey questions reflect European systems of government and policies that do not necessarily translate to U.S. laws and policies. Furthermore, MIPEX data does not provide information about the consequences of the reforms of the Finnish Nationality Act (2011), Aliens Act (2010 and 2012), and new Integration Act (2011). Therefore, we have added some of the most important changes from the reforms. Furthermore, MIPEX measures only legislative actions and not their actual implementation or effect. That is why our analysis is twofold. Initially, we will give an overview of each policy area measured by MIPEX. After that we will examine how these policies actually reflect the reality of Somali immigrants' integration in the U.S. and Finland.

#### **IV. Somali Migration to Finland and to the U.S.**

Somalis started to enter Finland in the early 1990s as asylum seekers, many of them arriving via the Soviet Union. One factor linking Somalis to Finland was Finland's geographic proximity to the Soviet Union. When the Somali civil war broke out, Somalis studying in the Soviet Union represented a "pull" factor for Somalis who were seeking

asylum. When the Soviet Union eventually collapsed and was therefore no longer able to host Somalis, Finland was the closest Western country. It has been claimed that the majority of Somalis who entered Finland between 1990 and 1992 did not consider Finland as their primary destination.<sup>7</sup>

The arrival of the first Somali asylum seekers in the early 1990s forms a milestone in the Finnish history of immigration. Somalis were the first large ethnic group that arrived in the country as spontaneous asylum seekers. "The flood of Somalis," as it was depicted in the media, surprised both common people and the Finnish authorities. Until then it was thought that remote Finland would receive only UNHCR-designated quota refugees.<sup>8</sup>

The number of Somalis grew rapidly and by the year 1995, over 4,000 Somalis resided in Finland. Somalis were the largest population group with an African background as well as the largest Muslim group. These characteristics have at least partially affected why Somalis in the 1990s became the subject of occasionally fervent public debate. The publicity around Somalis has often been sensational and problem oriented. Additionally, the time when Somalis started to arrive in Finland was far from optimal. Finland had gone through a severe economic depression in the early years of the 1990s, which increased negative attitudes towards Somalis significantly.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the year 2012, 195,500 foreigners (3.6% of the population) lived in Finland. Somalis were the fourth largest group, after Russians, Estonians, and Swedes. Somalis are also the third largest foreign language group after Russians and Estonians, and slightly ahead of people stating English as their first language. At the end of 2012, there were 14,769 people speaking Somali as their first language.

In contrast, a small community of voluntarily migrated Somali students and professionals has lived in the United States since the 1960s. However, the vast majority of Somali immigrants arrived as refugees following the civil war. The first Somali refugees arrived in the United States in 1990 and they were resettled in various states across the country. That year only twenty-five Somali refugees were resettled, but the number rose rapidly. The resettlement of Somalis has actually turned out to be one of the largest refugee resettlement programs in the United States history. With over 100,000 refugees resettled by 2012, Somalis are the largest African refugee population in the United States.

The state of Minnesota, which has lot of experience with resettlement, has admitted more Somali refugees (17,863) than any other state.

In addition, due to the favorable economic and social conditions, job opportunities, and existing Somali community, Minnesota has been a common target for secondary migration. According to the latest census numbers, there are 32,000 Somalis in Minnesota, which constitutes almost one-third of the total Somali population residing in the United States.

While those Somalis who migrated voluntarily to the United States before the 1990s had a relatively high level of education, now the majority of the refugees has come with very little, if any, formal education. Many of them have spent years in refugee camps prior to their arrival in the United States. Lack of formal qualifications and limited English language skills have led to unemployment, economic difficulties, and dependence on public assistance. As a result, over half of all the Somali families live below the poverty level. In addition to economic problems, the misconceptions and suspicions related to Islam have made the integration of Somalis more difficult.

## **V. Analysis: Policies and Demographics of Somali Immigrants' Civic Integration**

As already mentioned, we approach the topic of civic integration through the concepts of citizenship as a status and citizenship as a practice. Access to nationality and the rights attached to it are important indicators of integration, but they are not enough to explain the real life conditions faced by the Somali immigrants. In addition, citizenship as a practice needs to be evaluated through data from the labor market, educational systems, political memberships, etc. In the following sections we look at civic integration in four categories: (1) settling in, (2) possibilities in educational and labor market hierarchies, (3) membership in the collective decision-making communities, and (4) ethnic equality and anti-discrimination practices.

### **A. Settling In**

Beginning to feel at home requires that a newcomer is an equal and accepted member of his/her new community, and thus able to live a normal and satisfactory life with fellow community members. Under this rubric, the MIPEX-data allows a comparison of access to nationality, family reunion prospects, and residency durations. Besides formal rights, these indicators refer to a certain kind of emotional and everyday stability of life—or at least to a formal promise for promoting it.

As a nation of immigrants, the U.S. encourages newcomers to become citizens in order to fully participate in American public life. Its core principles on formal citizenship are: 5-years' permanent residence for newcomers, birthright citizenship for their descendants, and dual nationality. Most applicants manage the revised citizenship test successfully. Nevertheless, obstacles in the current procedure can keep eligible immigrants from the promise of citizenship. New fees,<sup>10</sup> backlogs without any legal time limit, and discretionary security checks may discourage eligible residents and leave applicants insecure about their status.

Finland, in turn, does not provide a clear and encouraging path to citizenship for its immigrant population. Applicants undergo a long and costly procedure, involving conditions that are counterproductive for integration. Current language requirements are also unfavorable. Otherwise, Finnish procedures are on par with established and reformed immigrant-receiving countries: dual nationality, the *jus soli* principle, and protection against removal.

In the United States, naturalization is important because citizens have significantly more rights than legal permanent residents. In fact, legal permanent residents have fewer rights in the U.S than in most of the European countries. Although Green-card holders are free to work and study, they do not qualify for many federal benefits. Moreover, legal permanent residents have a relatively fragile status, which can be lost for multiple reasons, including minor crimes, failure to file taxes, or travel abroad for more than six months. Many immigrants entering on temporary visas cannot settle as Green-card holders.

In Finland, legal permanent residents and citizens enjoy equal rights in most areas of life. Legal permanent residents can cast a vote in local and regional elections and they qualify for public benefits. The problem is, however, that many immigrants do not qualify for long-term residence. For example, temporary workers cannot apply to settle down permanently. Residence permits are renewed automatically, but they can be lost on various grounds, such as fraud, security threats, and serious offenses. Even a Finnish-born resident can be deported, at least in theory.

In the United States, legal permanent residents have a favorable chance of reunifying with their immediate family members. However, before families can reunite they must overcome numerous institutional barriers, including limited visa availability, high fees, and backlogs. For some the wait to reunite can be twenty years because the demand



for visas far outweighs availability. Once family members have arrived in the U.S., they have a secure future in the country and they enjoy the same rights as their sponsor. Yet U.S. immigration law often fails to reflect the different ways that people live together as families. For example, legal permanent residents cannot sponsor their parents or adult children.

In Finland, legal permanent residents can sponsor family reunification and the eligibility provisions aim for a quick and inclusive reunion of the family. Sponsors must, however, have a basic subsistence livelihood according to Finnish standards, and the amount may seem high for a newcomer. Family members have a right to work and study and to take needs-based introduction programs, but otherwise they only have some basic residence rights and security. Their permits can also be withdrawn on several grounds. The major area of weakness is autonomous residence. Family members are entitled to autonomous status only in particularly difficult circumstances.

When looking at the opportunities of Somalis to settle in the United States, it is important to bear in mind that the vast majority has arrived in the United States as refugees. Indeed, around 90 percent of all the legal permanent residences granted to Somali immigrants between 1996 and 2011 have been due to their refugee status. As refugees, Somalis have had better access to American society than have temporary immigrants or asylum-seekers. As green card holders, they have been able to work and study and they have received at least some public assistance. It is also important to remember that legal permanent residents can apply for U.S. citizenship. According to the 2010 American Community Survey, 23 percent of American Somalis are U.S. citizens by naturalization. In addition, around 30 percent of American Somalis are citizens by birth.

As legal permanent residents and later as U.S. citizens, Somalis have had the right to reunite with their families. Family ties were the second most common reason (9% of all the cases) for legal permanent residences granted to Somalis between 1996 and 2011.<sup>11</sup> There is, however, lot of controversy around the family reunification of Somalis. Due to the high number of fraudulent family-tie claims, the State Department is not accepting any P-3<sup>12</sup> refugee status applications that are made in Kenya or Ethiopia. In addition, it has also become harder for a citizen or legal permanent resident to sponsor a visa for family members. The embassy in Kenya has started to require a special refugee ID as a precondition for the family visa application. DNA tests are also slowing



down the family reunification process significantly. Furthermore, the number of legal permanent residences granted to family members outside the immediate family is extremely low. In 2011, it was one percent of all the legal permanent residences granted for Somalis.

In Finland, in turn, the first arrivals were predominantly asylum seekers. This means that their status was more vulnerable and uncertain. Before the asylum application is processed and asylum granted, asylum seekers lack the long-term security and perspective of legal permanent residents. It should be borne in mind, however, that relatively soon the main reason for arrival switched from asylum seekers to family reunification, which means that also in Finland the majority of the newcomers have arrived with a certain degree of security. Yet their status is significantly weaker than the status of those Somalis who reunited with their families in the United States. As already mentioned, in Finland family members do not have the same rights as their sponsors.

As legal permanent residents, Somalis enjoy more rights in Finland than in the U.S. In Finland, the rights are more or less equal to those of citizens. Despite this relatively strong and secure status, many Somalis have applied for Finnish citizenship. At the end of 2012, Finland had 14,769 people speaking Somali as their first language,<sup>13</sup> and around 7,500 of them had Finnish citizenship. Between 1990 and 2012, Somalis formed the second largest migrant group to receive Finnish citizenship, after Russians. Likewise in 2012, they were the second biggest group to apply for Finnish citizenship.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to the high number of citizenship applications, the number of residence permit applications submitted by Somalis has decreased significantly during the past couple of years. In 2011, Somalis were still the second biggest group to seek a residence permit, but in 2012, they dropped to ninth place.<sup>15</sup> This is largely due to the 2012 amendment to the Aliens Act. Somalis seek residence permits predominantly through family reunification channels (99% of the applications), and the amendment makes it impossible for a person already living in Finland to file the application. Instead, the family member wishing to immigrate has to submit the application to the closest Finnish diplomatic mission, which in the case of Somalia is either in Kenya or Ethiopia. Also, these applications are rejected far more often than accepted. In 2011, around 70 percent of the residence permit applications based on family ties were declined. This percentage is higher than with any other immigrant group.

## **B. Education and Labor**

Citizenship positions and hierarchies of Western societies are often defined by educational and working life success. Although laws and policies tell us something concrete about an immigrant's position and possibilities in the fields of education and employment, demographic statistics may be the most relevant evidence of structural mechanisms dividing people according to their social backgrounds.

Legal permanent status in the U.S. gives most migrant workers and their families some of the same chances in the labor market as native-born Americans. Both can look for employment, start a business, get help from the government in their job hunt, expect the same kinds of working conditions, and pay the same levels of tax and social security. Still, the jobs that immigrants find may be far below their skills because some states and professional organizations are not working together to recognize their foreign diplomas. Countries with comprehensive integration strategies better acknowledge this and other specific needs of workers born and trained abroad (e.g., the Nordics).

Finland promotes migrant labor market mobility to small degree. Still, not all temporary migrants with the right to work can change jobs and labor sectors as Finns can. All permanent residents can work in all economic sectors, but public sector language requirements may disproportionately exclude the foreign-born.<sup>16</sup> Finland is working on a common area of weakness: general and targeted support that migrant workers can use to improve their skills and qualifications for the Finnish labor market. All do not have the same access as Finns to study grants<sup>17</sup> or equal facilitated procedures recognizing foreign qualifications.<sup>18</sup>

Somalis have faced great difficulties while trying to access the labor markets both in Finland and the U.S. For example, the unemployment rate among Minnesota's Somali population is significantly higher than the state's average. According to the 2010 Census data, 47 percent of Somalis (16 and older) are employed, 13 percent are unemployed, and 40 percent are not part of the workforce. The unemployment rate among the general population is 5 percent. The most common fields of employment among Somalis are production and transportation, service, and office and sales work. In addition, Minnesota's Somali community is known for its high number of small businesses. A survey made in 2009 identified 375 businesses that were owned by Somalis.<sup>19</sup>

In Finland, the situation is even worse. At the end of the year 2011, 26 percent (1,905) of Somali citizens residing permanently in Finland were part of the workforce, of which 62 percent were men. Around 34 percent (640) of the workforce was currently employed. The share of employed women was 23 percent. Only six persons worked as entrepreneurs. They were all men. Out of those who have stated Somali as their first language, 25 percent were part of the workforce in 2010. The share of those with employment (48%) was higher in this category. The share of employed women (32%) was again lower than men. All in all, this category entails twenty-seven (25 men and 2 women) entrepreneurs.<sup>20</sup>

The number of Somali businesses is very low in Finland. According to a recent survey,<sup>21</sup> none of the Somalis who moved to Finland between the years 1999 and 2007 were entrepreneurs. All the existing Somali entrepreneurs had moved to Finland during the first wave of immigration in the early 1990s. According to Annika Forsander, Somalis arriving during the first wave were more educated and therefore had perhaps more resources to start a business.<sup>22</sup> The low number of Somali entrepreneurs might also be due to the economic conditions that prevailed during their arrival. In the early 1990s, Finland went through a severe economic depression and the unemployment rate was historically high. Because employment opportunities were scarce, immigrants were encouraged to seek education, and Somali men especially have actively used the prevailing opportunities. Instead of entrepreneurship, they have thus chosen a different path towards employment. In addition, the role of racial discrimination should not be ignored.

Education is generally perceived as the most effective means for upward mobility and improved position in the labor market. In the U.S., all students, regardless of their civic status, attend free public schools and thus have access to basic education. Undocumented students neither have clear legal paths to college nor in-state tuition in thirty-nine states (unlike around half of the MIPEx countries). Targeted programs tend to help minority students and speakers with limited English to complete school, from pre-school to college. Still, states rarely utilize the new opportunities that migrant children bring. Some guarantee that all students can learn immigrant languages as their foreign language, with circa ten states requiring bilingual education. A third of the states require all teachers to be trained for diverse classrooms. Some states also try training and recruiting immigrant teachers.

In Finland, all the young people in the country, whatever their status, have an implicit right to education. From pre-school to university, pupils from migrant backgrounds have the right to language and additional support to access all levels of education. Although teachers are not specifically trained to assess what their pupils have learned abroad, they can use some standards and tools to place the child in the right school year and level. Pupils also have the right to learn their mother tongue. Together with their parents, they receive an induction program and parents are encouraged and supported to get involved in school life under the National Curriculum for Basic Education. However, while academic needs are addressed, the school system does not fully harness the new opportunities brought by diversity since systems to promote social integration and monitor segregation in schools are absent.

Minnesota is commonly considered the “Best Practices” example of Somali integration in the United States,<sup>23</sup> but even in Minnesota, Somalis are facing difficulties. The educational attainment of Minnesota’s adult Somali population (18 and older) is remarkably lower than the state’s average. According to the 2010 Census, 55 percent of Minnesota’s Somalis (18 and older) have a high school degree, 6 percent a bachelor’s degree, and 2 percent a graduate degree. It is noteworthy that every third Somali has attended less than nine grades of school. Again according to the 2010 Census, 19 percent of the Somali population between the ages of 18 and 34 were currently enrolled in college or graduate school.

In addition, 13,095 Somali-speaking children attend schools in Minnesota. The number of Somali students is generally high in large public schools in the metropolitan area. Minnesota is also the birthplace of the charter school<sup>24</sup> movement, and currently there are twelve charter schools that cater their services specifically to the Somali community. In 2011, every third Somali pupil in Minnesota attended charter school. The performance of schools with a high number of Somali students can be scrutinized through the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)<sup>25</sup> assessment, which is a measurement defined by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. In 2011, none of the ten public schools with the highest numbers of Somali students in the Minneapolis school district passed the AYP. In this sense, the Somali charter schools seemed to be performing better. Seven out of twelve schools passed the AYP in 2011.<sup>26</sup>

The educational attainment of Somali citizens living in Finland is also low. Of all the 15- to 64-year-old Somalis, 89 percent (4,597) have

completed only the intermediate school education or the level of education is unknown. Less than 10 percent has completed secondary education and only 1.5 percent has completed college/university education.<sup>27</sup> A study conducted by the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare confirms the low level of education among Somalis. Out of all the 18 to 64-year-old Somalis who were interviewed between 2010 and 2012, one-fourth of the men and as many as one-third of the women had no formal education. Forty-nine percent of the Somalis had completed primary education or lower secondary education (or part of it) while 26 percent had completed general upper-secondary education (or part of it). The highest educational attainment differs according to gender: 40 percent of the men and only 16 percent of the women had studied at the general upper-secondary education level. This gender gap was widest among the older age group (45–64), whereas among the younger ones (18–29) there was no difference. Also, the time spent in Finland matters. Among those who had spent less than six years in Finland, only 15 percent had completed a general upper-secondary education, whereas among those who had spent more than fourteen years in Finland the share was 41 percent.<sup>28</sup>

### **C. Participation in Decision-Making Communities**

Originally the concept of citizenship had a lot to do with power, equality, and collective decisions. In the historical course of modernity these principles have found their forms in democracy and parliamentarism. “One man, one vote” has been an important formal (though ideal) yardstick of civic equality for a couple of centuries. Despite this, immigrant members in different parliamentary organizations are still quite rare in many democratic societies.

Immigrants without U.S. citizenship have very few formal opportunities in American democratic life. All inhabitants in the U.S. have basic political freedoms, as is the case in most MIPLEX countries. Still, very few legal residents have local voting rights. More residents may get them, as towns and states debate the idea. Furthermore, several cities and states have recently recognized the importance of integration and created Councils of New Americans, though with only basic mandates.

Finland’s approach to democracy encourages all residents to participate in decisions that concern their daily lives. Newcomers can vote and stand in local and regional elections. All residents enjoy the same

political liberties, such as joining a political party, forming community associations, and creating new media. Authorities also reach out to migrants by fostering immigrant civil society and consulting through bodies that create positive environments for dialogue. Migrants are consulted at national and regional levels as elected NGO participants in an Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations. According to the MIPEx results, Finland can also be seen as slightly favorable when it comes to consulting migrants about ways to improve policies.

When looking at the political participation of Somalis in the United States, we again take the case example from Minnesota. Voter turnout in Minnesota is traditionally one of the highest in the whole nation. It varies, however, according to different ethnic minorities and socioeconomic statuses. Voter turnout among African Americans, Latinos, and Asians is significantly lower than among whites. Also, naturalized citizens go to the polls less often than natural-born citizens. Voter turnout is also associated with the level of education and income.

Several Somali candidates have run for public offices in Minnesota with varying success. The first candidate was Mahamoud Wardere, who ran for Minneapolis mayor in 2001. The first elected public official with a Somali background was Hussein Samatar (now deceased), who was elected to the Minneapolis School Board in 2010. In 2013, Abdi Warsame became the first Somali American to be elected to the Minneapolis city council. Although the success of Somali candidates has remained modest, Minnesota's Somali community has proven to be a political force that can be mobilized for political participation. In the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, which has a very large Somali community, the voter turnout in primary elections grows drastically when Somali, or otherwise preferable, candidates are running.

The Somali community is also otherwise involved in decision-making communities. For example, Somalis have a permanent membership in the Council on Black Minnesotans, which works under the state governor. Also, the Democratic Party of Minnesota has its own Somali-American caucus, and the Immigrant Relations committee of the Republican Party is currently led by a person with a Somali background. Somalis have also founded many organizations and NGOs. The Somali Action Alliance, among others, works actively to increase the political participation of Somalis.

There is only limited information about the voting behavior of immigrants in Finland. In a survey, only one-third of Somalis said that they had voted in the municipal elections of 2000.<sup>29</sup> The voter turnout



among foreign citizens in municipal elections has usually been around 20 percent,<sup>30</sup> whereas the general voter turnout is much higher (in 2008 it was 61%<sup>31</sup>). In the study conducted by the National Institute for Health and Welfare, almost half (49%) of the interviewed Somalis with Finnish citizenship said that they had voted in the previous parliamentary elections. Men (71%) claimed to have voted much more actively than women (32%).<sup>32</sup>

In 2012 municipal elections, 29 Somalis were candidates. They represented 0.4 percent of Somalis with the right to be elected. Over the years, there have been some Somali municipal politicians, but overall their participation in decision-making offices has been low. The most prominent politician has been Zahra Abdulla, who has been member of the city government in Helsinki since 1997. There have not been any Somalis in the Finnish parliament, but Abdulla was the second runner-up in the 2007 Parliamentary elections.

#### **D. Ethnic Equality and Anti-Discrimination Policies**

Discrimination, as well as anti-discrimination, is a theme that could have been examined as linked with all other topics addressed above. However, it deserves special attention as it seems that if the societies do not manage in this field, other immigration policies and programs have no discursive power.

People in the U.S. enjoy the strongest laws to protect them against discrimination and guarantee them equal opportunities. Racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination is illegal in all areas of life. Equal opportunities legislation guarantees that no legal residents can be denied opportunities because of their national origins or citizenship. The U.S. also limits discrimination due to language requirements or foreign accents that may cause indirect discrimination. For example, employers cannot require a higher level of English than is strictly necessary for the job, landlords cannot rent only to American citizens, and schools and government agencies cannot refuse to service people with limited English. In the United States, the mechanisms to enforce the law for potential victims of discrimination are more favorable than in all the MIPEX countries. Furthermore, disadvantaged groups can benefit from affirmative action as well as support for minority businesses, for instance through supplier diversity.

In Finland, all residents benefit from broad laws in all spheres of life against discrimination based on nationality, religion, race, and ethnic-



ity. As victims, they can obtain legal aid to seek a range of sanctions via the choice of legal, administrative, and alternative actions, and they do not always carry the burden of proof. However, they cannot rely on NGOs for support and must bring the case themselves, without class actions or *actio popularis*. They receive some independent assistance from the Ombudsman for Minorities and Discrimination Tribunal, although the decisions of the Ombudsman are not binding. The government has obligations to promote equality beyond what is required in most countries.

Research shows that despite the comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, American Somalis have experienced discrimination and harassment in schools, workplaces, and in their free time. In terms of employment discrimination, the statistics of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission show that the number of religion-based discrimination charges involving Muslims is increasing nationwide.<sup>33</sup> Somali employees have also filed several discrimination cases against their employers. For example, in 2010, chicken processor Gold'n Plump had to pay a total of \$365,000 in the settlement of a federal lawsuit after it terminated the contracts of Somali workers who prayed during their work shifts. In the field of education, the Council on American-Islamic Relations requested a federal investigation into allegations of harassment toward Muslim students of Somali origin in the St. Cloud and Owatonna school districts in Minnesota.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, in a recent survey Somalis reported that they feel that law enforcement officials treat them with suspicion and special scrutiny because of their ethnic and religious identities.<sup>35</sup>

In Finland, attitudes toward immigrants have become more positive between the years 1987 and 2007. But despite this general trend, attitudes toward Somalis specifically have remained approximately the same.<sup>36</sup> Out of all the immigrant groups in Finland, Somalis are the most common target for racist crimes and discrimination.<sup>37</sup> According to a hate crime survey by the Finnish police, Somali citizens were proportionally the most common victim of racist crimes in 2011. There were ten suspected racist crimes per one thousand Somalis. If racist crimes are scrutinized based on victim's birthplace, Somalis are the second most common victim (after Finns). On the other hand, Somalis also commit a lot of crimes. According to a survey of the National Research Institute of Legal Policy, Somalis (1,393) were the third most common foreign nationality—after Estonians (2,030) and Russians (1,882)—who were suspected of committing crimes.

## VI. Conclusions

According to the MIPEx results, the policies in Finland and the United States are generally speaking “slightly favorable” for the integration and equality of their immigrant populations. In the ranking of thirty-one countries, Finland had the fourth and the United States had the ninth most favorable conditions for integration. Although these two countries have different approaches to immigrant integration and although the implemented policies are often different, they seem to be producing a very similar outcome. For example, in the categories of *Labor Market Mobility*, *Access to Nationality*, *Family Reunion*, and *Education*, Finland and the U.S. scored very similar results. Finland was especially strong in the category of *Political Participation*, whereas the United States scored the highest points in *Anti-Discrimination*. For Finland, the weakest categories were *Access to Nationality* and *Long Term Residence*. The United States, in turn, scored its lowest points in *Education* and *Long-Term Residence*.

A comparison between the MIPEx results and the national statistics concerning the Somali population can help to address the gaps between theory and practice. For example, according to the MIPEx, both Finland and the U.S. provide “slightly favorable” conditions for labor market mobility. Yet the employment opportunities for Somalis are dramatically weaker in Finland than in the United States. In a similar fashion, although Finland scores high points in the category of *Political Participation*, the political role of Somalis (and immigrants in general) has remained modest.

At this point, it is important to remember that MIPEx measures only laws and political principles; it does not measure how these laws are implemented or how they intertwine with other aspects of life. Indeed, the success or failure of integration is not determined by immigration and integration laws alone. On the contrary, many different factors, ranging from the state’s economy to biased media coverage, play a significant role in the process. That is why the civic integration of Somalis has to be perceived in a broader political, social, and historical context.

This broader social context can also help to illuminate some of the main differences in the civic integration of Somalis in Finland and in the U.S. To reiterate, the first Somalis arrived in Finland at a very unfortunate time. Finland went through a dramatic economic depression, the unemployment rate was skyrocketing, and there was a lot of uncertainty and anxiety. In addition, because the Somalis were the first

significant group of emergency asylum seekers, the Finnish authorities were not prepared for their arrival. Furthermore, Somalis were the largest population group with an African background and the largest Muslim group. These characteristics at least partially explain why Somalis became the subject of a sensational and problem-oriented public debate. Although Finnish society is much more diverse today, the discourse around Somalis has remained consistent. In contrast, in the United States the social conditions were more favorable for the arrival of Somalis. Resettling refugees was nothing new and that is why the necessary services and know-how were already in place. Furthermore, more jobs were available for newcomers, and the religiously and ethnically diverse society made it easier for Somalis to settle in.

In addition to the social and historical contexts, the legal status of Somali arrivals was very different in Finland and in the United States. The majority of Somalis arrived in the U.S. as refugees, which gave them at least some degree of security. In Finland, the first arrivals were asylum seekers, which put them in a vulnerable and uncertain position. And although relatively soon the main reason for arrival changed from asylum seeking to family reunification, the legal status of the newcomers remains far from optimal in Finland. Immigrants who arrive through family reunification do not have all the same rights as their sponsors. This is a serious weakness considering the high proportion of family reunification among Somalis.

As legal permanent residents, Somalis enjoy more rights in Finland than in the U.S. In Finland, the rights are more or less similar to those of citizens, whereas in the United States, the gap between legal permanent residents and citizens is relatively wide. Nevertheless, in both countries, legal permanent residents have an access to naturalization. And although both Finland and the U.S have their own issues with the naturalization process, Somalis in both countries have actively applied for citizenship in their new home countries.

In addition to a secure status and adequate rights, it is important for the well-being and integration of the newcomers that they can live with their families. Family reunification, however, is fairly complicated in both countries. Especially for someone who is not an immediate relative (spouse or minor child), it is extremely hard to get a residence permit. In Finland, the number of applications is in steep decline partly due to the renewed process, which is more complicated, and partly due to the fact that the majority of applications are declined. In the United States, only around one percent of all the legal permanent resident

statuses are granted based on other family ties. Therefore, Somalis, who often live with extended families, clearly suffer from the Western emphasis on the nuclear family.

Education is commonly perceived as one of the key factors for the upward mobility and civic integration of immigrants and their children. Both Finland and the United States have free public schools and special programs that target the needs of the newcomers. It is also worth noticing that in Finland immigrants have the legal right to learn their first languages in school. In the state of Minnesota, charter schools provide an interesting option for Somali pupils to study in a culturally sensitive and safe environment. Opinions vary, however, about whether charter schools can improve the learning results and the interaction with the mainstream society.

Access to the labor market constructs perhaps the biggest difference in the life-courses of Somalis in Finland and in the United States. In Finland, the unemployment rate among Somalis is astoundingly high. Roughly speaking, every second Somali in the workforce is unemployed. In the United States the situation is a little bit better, although the unemployment rate among Somalis is higher than the national average. Another significant difference is the number of Somali business owners. There are only a handful of Somali entrepreneurs in the whole of Finland, whereas in the state of Minnesota alone, Somalis run hundreds and hundreds of successful businesses.

Somalis are known for their interest in politics, but the final breakthrough into the national political elite still remains undone in both countries. Nevertheless, Somalis in Finland and the United States have shown their interest in political participation by actively casting votes and running for office. Especially in the state of Minnesota, Somalis are well organized and slowly becoming part of the political establishment.

Discrimination and racism still exist in both countries. In Finland year after year, Somalis are the most common targets of racist crimes. In the United States, Somalis as Muslims have been under scrutiny, especially after 9/11 and the "War on Terror." Yet it is also worth noting that Somalis are not voluntarily accepting the victim role. On the contrary, especially in the United States, Somalis are using the rights provided to them by the anti-discrimination laws. They have won several discrimination cases against their employers.

In this article, we have analyzed the civic integration of Somalis from two different perspectives. First of all, we have constructed the

political and juridical framework of integration through national laws and policies, and secondly, we have shed some light on the integration experiences of Somalis in Finland and the U.S. Already such a rough comparison has indicated serious gaps between theory and practice and between policies and real life. These preliminary findings will be our starting point as we continue to scrutinize the contexts of diaspora citizenship.

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### Notes

1. Lister 2003, p. 57.
2. Oldfield 1990; Lister 2003; Isin and Wood 1999.
3. Isin and Wood 1999.
4. Ronkainen 2011.
5. Castles 1994.
6. Huddleston et al. 2011.
7. Alitolppa-Niitamo 2004.
8. Lepola 2000; Tiilikainen 2003.
9. Tiilikainen 2003.
10. Fees rose by 69% in 2007 in the U.S. These are now higher than in most MIPEX countries (half of them ask for just normal administrative fees similar to obtaining passports).
11. Homeland Security 2013.
12. P-3 is a refugee status granted for a family member of a person who entered United States as a refugee, or who was granted asylum.
13. *Statistics Finland* 2013a.
14. *Statistics Finland* 2013b.
15. The Finnish Immigration Service 2013.
16. Language skill requirements concern everyone, including natives and EU/EEA citizens. There are separate laws for teachers, social workers, the police, etc. The overall requirement for language skill in public sector jobs is stated in the Constitution (11.6.1999/731). This requirement overrides the requirement for equal treatment.
17. There is a right for study grants only if the TCN is issued with a continuing or permanent residence permit, but not for the TCNs with temporary residence permits.
18. The recognition of qualifications taken outside the EU/EEA countries is governed by the law (531/1986) and decree (519/1997) on the competence for civil service posts conferred by higher education studies taken abroad. According to the legislation, only higher education degrees may be recognized. For qualifications of other levels, the National Board of Education may provide advisory statements.
19. Golden, Heger Boyle and Yaman 2010.
20. *Statistics Finland* 2012b.
21. Joronen 2012.
22. Forsander 2002.

23. Yusuf 2012.
24. Charter schools are primary or secondary schools that receive public money, but generally have more flexibility than traditional public schools. Charter schools are commonly founded by teachers, parents, or activists who feel restricted by traditional public schools.
25. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is based on standardized tests taken by the students.
26. Minnesota Department of Education 2012.
27. *Statistics Finland* 2012a.
28. Castaneda et al. 2012.
29. Pohjanpää et al. 2003.
30. Ahokas et al. 2011.
31. *Statistics Finland* 2009.
32. Castaneda et al. 2012.
33. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2013.
34. Yusuf 2012.
35. Bernard 2006.
36. Jaakkola 2009.
37. Niemi et al. 2009.

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